

Immigration—Part 2

The Long Voyage

Leaving home required great courage. The voyage across the Atlantic or Pacific was often miserable. Most immigrants could afford only the cheapest berths. Ship owners jammed up to 2,000 people in steerage, as the airless rooms below decks were called. On the return voyage, cattle and cargo filled these same spaces. In such close quarters, diseases spread rapidly. **STOP**



For most European immigrants the voyage ended in New York City. There, after 1886, they saw the giant Statue of Liberty in the harbor. The statue was a gift from France to the United States. The Statue of Liberty became a symbol of the hope and freedom offered by the United States. **STOP**

Adjusting to the New Land

Many immigrants had heard stories that the streets in the United States were paved with gold. Once in the United States, the newcomers had to adjust their dreams to reality. They immediately set out to find work. European peasants living on the land had little need for money, but it took cash to survive in the United States. Through friends, relatives, labor contractors, and employment agencies, the new arrivals found jobs. **STOP**

Most immigrants stayed in the cities where they landed. The slums of the cities soon became packed with poor immigrants. By 1900, one such neighborhood on the lower east side of New York had become the most crowded place in the world. **STOP**

Ethnic Neighborhoods

Immigrants adjusted to their new lives by settling in neighborhoods with their own ethnic group. An ethnic group is a group of people who share a common culture. Across the United States, cities were patchworks of Italian, Irish, Polish, Hungarian, German, Jewish, and Chinese neighborhoods. Within these ethnic neighborhoods, newcomers spoke their own language and celebrated special holidays with food prepared as in the old country. **STOP**

Becoming Americans

Often newcomers were torn between the old traditions and American ways. Still, many struggled to learn the language of their new nation. Learning English was an important step toward becoming a citizen. The process of becoming part of another culture is called assimilation. Many Americans opposed the increase

in immigration. They felt the newcomers would not assimilate because their languages, religions, and customs were too different. However, they were wrong.

STOP

Children assimilated more quickly than their parents. They learned English in school and then helped their families learn to speak it. Because children wanted to be seen as American, they often gave up customs their parents honored. They played American games and dressed in American-style clothes.

STOP

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